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FM AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4833
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 NDJAMENA 000070

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SENSITIVE, SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL PREF CD SU

SUBJECT: SPECIAL ENVOY NATSIOS TO REBELS: TIME IS NOT
ON YOUR SIDE

¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY: In his meeting with DPA non-signatory groups, Presidential Special Envoy Andrew Natsios delivered a clear message to rebel leaders gathered in eastern Chad that the only solution to the Darfur crisis was through negotiation. He informed them that the USG supported an all-inclusive political negotiation process that would lead to a "just peace" based on amendments to the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA). Natsios emphasized U.S. support for the efforts of AU Special Envoy for Darfur, Salim Ahmed Salim and UN Special Envoy Jan Eliasson. Rebel leaders welcomed the Special Envoy's visit, but reiterated familiar concerns about the failings of the DPA. All participants agreed that disunity was hurting the movement; they were interested in a process to unify the movements, identify leadership and political aims, but some were either unable to articulate a clear way forward in that forum or had more inchoate views. The meetings provided an opportunity to discuss the relationship between the violence in Darfur and its spillover effect into Chad. END SUMMARY.

Meeting Participants

¶12. (SBU) Special Envoy Natsios met with Sudanese rebel leaders in Chad on January 19 (Abeche) and January 20 (Ndjamena) accompanied by the Ambassador. In attendance were Sudanese rebels affiliated with the National Redemption Front (NRF): Dr. Sharif Hariri, Sudanese Liberation Movement (SLM), Dr. Khalil Ibrahim, Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), and Khamis Abdullah (SLM). Also seated at the main table were Ahmad Togoud (JEM) and Adam Shogar (SLM). In side meetings on January 19 and 20, President Special Envoy met with SLM breakaway leader Ahmed Abdul Shafi and G-19 Field Commander Adam Bakhit. DCM met with NMRD leader Hassam Hamis and Rizeygat Arab leader Abu Sullah Surah on January 19. Ouddai Governor Touka Ramadan opened the meeting with the NRF and attended both the morning and afternoon session. Approximately thirty political advisers and field commanders sat in on the meetings as well, listening intently (through translation) and asking questions at the end.

USG Message to Rebels

¶13. (SBU) In his introductory remarks, Special Envoy Natsios explained that the U.S. was committed to exploring ways to help the parties to make progress towards a resolution of the Darfur conflict. Natsios noted that prior to his arrival in Chad he had made a commitment to Sudanese President Bashir to meet with the non-signatory Sudanese rebel groups in an effort to

relaunch the peace process. The Special Envoy stressed that there could be no military victory by the government against the rebels - or vice-versa: the only solution was negotiation. However, time was on the side of the Khartoum government. With the Sudanese economy growing briskly, the Government of National Unity (GNU) would have no problem financing a war in Darfur. Mr. Natsios reminded the leaders that the international community was committed to supporting the UN and the African Union (AU) in mediating a political process leading to peace. One thing in particular was very clear: the international community would not support regime change by violent means. The U.S. Government believed that the Sudanese people had the right to change their government - by elections. If any group stated that it intended to overthrow the government, the United States would not work with them.

¶4. (SBU) The Special Envoy also cautioned that, although there was a powerful civil society coalition in the United States seeking to end the conflict and suffering in Darfur, the rebels should not assume that this coalition supported the rebels. The rebels also needed to understand that neither the United States nor NATO would intervene militarily to assist the rebels in Darfur. And finally, the Special Envoy enjoined them to work towards a single position. Disunity was their most serious problem. All of the groups - not just the NRF - needed to speak with one voice. Mr. Natsios emphasized that the rebels needed to come up with something - in writing - that corrects the DPA weaknesses. If an agreement is not in writing, the United States and other players cannot pressure the Sudanese Government to implement it.

NDJAMENA 00000070 002 OF 004

¶5. (SBU) Special Envoy Natsios informed the leaders that the United States told President Bashir to stop bombing commanders meetings. He reported that President Bashir had agreed not to bomb the upcoming commanders meeting on or about January 20 and that the UN and AU would provide logistical support. He noted that this conference was supposed to be a meeting to develop a unified political position - not a conference for military consolidation. He underscored that the United States supported holding such a political conference, and urged full participation in the conference.

¶6. (SBU) The Special Envoy encouraged the leaders to remember that they needed to be realistic in what they asked for and prioritize their most important issues. He affirmed that if the rebels negotiated in good faith, the international community would support them. In fact, the United States would contribute its own funding to help re-build Darfur. The Special Envoy underscored the point by telling the group that President Bush had asked him to tell them that the United States would be generous. And finally, the Special Envoy told all rebel groups in no uncertain terms that attacks on humanitarian workers and vehicles needed to cease.

Reaction by the Rebels

¶7. (SBU) Dr. Sharif Hariri spoke first and characterized the NRF as a serious attempt to create unity so as to better represent the Darfur people. He shared the concerns of the Special Envoy about the need to speak with one voice. Looking back, he argued that using the AU had been a tactical mistake - Darfurians has been used as "guinea pigs." Therefore, they welcomed the involvement of the UN and the United

States and pledged the NRF's cooperation to reach a comprehensive and just agreement. Dr. Hariri asked for the UN to lead the Darfur negotiation process, as the AU lacked the capacity to fulfill its duties. He suggested a "4 & 1" conference. This conference would consist of: non-signatory rebel groups and the countries bordering Sudan, including Chad, Libya, Central African Republic (CAR) Eritrea and Egypt. Natsios said he would mention this idea to Eliasson, but pointed out that a successful negotiation required a neutral party - and all of the countries named had interests in Darfur

¶18. (SBU) Dr. Hariri reported that the NRF was ready for serious political engagement and intended to meet with other groups in order to unite. In fact, meetings had already begun in Abeche with field commanders. He professed, however, to be unaware of the January 20 meeting and of UN involvement in logistics assistance. The Special Envoy suggested to Hariri that the goals of the short term should be for the rebels to agree on priority actions and to come together politically, instead of creating a new mechanism outside the DPA. The Special Envoy also noted that it would be a step forward if the rebel movements would make a statement saying that they did not seek regime change by force.

DPA Views

¶19. (SBU) Natsios asked if the JEM, SLM and NRF leaders would agree to amendments to the DPA, with the ultimate aim of making sure there is a "just peace." In a carefully prepared statement representing the agreed views of the participants, Adam Togoud recounted the NRF's view of why the DPA failed, i.e. not taking into account the historical marginalization of the people of Darfur, issues with power-sharing, wealth-sharing, and security arrangements. He asserted that, based on population, the people of Darfur deserved proportional representation in the central government as well as a vice presidential position. They would request 15% of Sudan's national revenues to be given to a regional government of Darfur as well as a share to assist in developing the region. He called for a significant increase in compensation, to \$500 per person refugee or IDP, to help the displaced return to their homes in addition to a commission and special fund to pay them for damages they have suffered. Per security, he said the NRF wants to be able to retain its forces during a transitional period to be agreed upon, after which they would be integrated into the national army. They would

NDJAMENA 00000070 003 OF 004

also request disarmament of the janjaweed and withdrawal of the Sudanese forces to the garrisons held before hostilities started.

¶10. (SBU) Natsios responded that, the United States believed the DPA offered the best opportunity to achieve that goal; it was not realistic to think that the international community would support negotiation of a totally new agreement. Adam Shogar (SLA) stated that they were ready to negotiate on the basis of the principles laid out by Togoud, but amending the DPA "would not work." Dr. Hariri was more emphatic, stating that the "DPA cannot be the basis for negotiation." JEM leader Khalil Ibrahim offered a more nuanced position, stating that if the demands could be addressed within the DPA, it didn't matter what it was called. However, he believed that the amendments sought by the NRF were incompatible with the DPA.

Hybrid Force: Don't Put the Cart Before the Horse

¶11. (SBU) Natsios noted that under the DPA and the Addis Ababa agreement, the message was clear: Sudan must accept the three stages of the UN Proposal, including accepting a hybrid AU-UN force in Darfur. He reiterated that the international community supports the AU/UN taking the lead in forging a peace for Darfur and formed an international coalition (consisting of the Arab league, Egypt, China and others) to push the Sudanese towards a negotiated settlement. Thus far, Natsios said, the USG has been relatively successful - including getting AU to put 7,000 troops on the ground in Darfur and convincing Bashir to agree to the first phase of the Addis Ababa framework. Meanwhile, however, it seemed that the non-signatory rebel groups have done virtually nothing to improve relations with each other to ensure a better future for their people. JEM's Dr. Ibrahim Khalil responded that the arrival of the hybrid force would need to be well-prepared. He asked what kind of peace the hybrid force was coming to enforce, and called it putting the cart before the horse. In the chaos of Darfur, he warned, no one would know which side the UN soldiers were on - the government's side? The janjaweed's side? The Special Envoy explained to Ibrahim that the role of the UN troops was quite clear: to protect IDPs, non-combatants and humanitarian workers. As the political process evolved, the UN's mandate could evolve as well to cover whatever was agreed with the government.

Meeting with Abdul Shafi

¶12. (SBU) In a separate meeting with SLM "Interim Chairman" Ahmed Abdul Shafi (arranged because Abdul Shafi was not considered part of the NRF), Abdul Shafi informed the Special Envoy that the situation in Darfur was getting worse. As movements, they were "helpless" because of internal dissension. His group had a proposal to unify all SLM factions and this process needed to finish. Abdul Shafi stated that a meeting of SLM field commanders was underway. The AU was supposed to be cooperating with certain logistics but ultimately did not send helicopters as the Government of Sudan would not guarantee security. After the SLM field commanders meeting, an SLM political conference (including refugees and civil society) would need to be held. These meeting would decide on leadership, minimum requirements for peace and whether to join the NRF or not. Asked whether he could work with the DPA, Abdul Shafi stated that the DPA had been a step forward. They were supportive of the initial Declaration of Principles, but not with the agreement finally negotiated in Abuja. There could be no lasting peace unless the root causes were addressed. As SLM, they saw two important phases: a development and security phase in Darfur, and a political and governance phase concerning the region's relationship to Khartoum.

Chad & Sudan: One Optic Lens

¶13. (SBU) While the meetings on 19 and 20 January focused on Darfur, in his meetings Natsios also stated that a dangerous development had taken place: Chadian aid to Sudanese rebel groups and Sudanese aid to Chadian rebel groups was exacerbating the situation and

NDJAMENA 00000070 004 OF 004

contributing to the escalation in violence in Darfur and eastern Chad. The most immediate consequence of this instability has been the rising number of

internally displaced persons in eastern Chad. (Note: A USG humanitarian assessment team is currently investigating the IDP situation in eastern Chad. The mission will last two weeks. End note.)

NMRD and Arab Leader

¶14. (SBU) DCM and other members of the Natsios delegation met with NMRD representative Hassam Hamis and southern Darfur Rizeyqat Arab leader Abu Sullah Surah on January 20. Their message to the Special Envoy was that Khartoum was the problem, the movements needed assistance to unify, and that the smaller movements needed to be present at the table and have their voices heard. Surah argued that the problem with the NRF was that other factions were unwilling to become part of it so long as JEM - with its Islamist, "Turabist" orientation, and unwillingness to separate politics from religion - was at the head. NMRD representative Hamis claimed that NMRD held the area in Darfur near Jebel Moon, and commanded 3,000 fighters (not all of whom were mobilized) and some 40-45 vehicles. He stated that his weapons were bought from Chad or CAR or stolen from the Sudanese government and that the NMRD was not receiving support from any foreign government.

Meeting with Adam Bakhit

¶15. (SBU) In a meeting January 20 in N'djamena with G-19 field commander Adam Bakhit, Bakhit echoed that peace would come if Darfurians could unite, and it was the goal of the rebels to unite both politically and militarily. Bakhit was evasive on the question of his participation in a commander's conference and was unwilling to provide a date or location because of security concerns. (He allowed that there was concern that the Government of Sudan would bomb the site). He did state however that the meeting would have a military and political side. Asked if he would join JEM, he explained that there was ambivalence concerning JEM -- recognition that if "some leaders" were left behind, that they would cause problems.

¶16. (SBU) According to Bakhit, the NRF was growing: Abdulshafi was preparing to join the NRF and some of his troops were with Bakhit (as were part of Abdelwahid's). Furthermore, according to Bakhit, Mini Minnawi - now commanding only 27 vehicles -- would be joining as well. The goal in uniting was to speak with one voice, with all commanders represented. He left the impression that he was trying to unite all of the groups under his leadership. When asked, he stated that violent regime change was not their plan or objective. Concerning future political negotiations with the Sudanese Government, Bakhit stated that a new DPA was needed, not just amendments to the existing DPA; it was impossible to work on something that had been signed by President Bashir and Minni Minawi. He supported President Deby's argument that the Sudanese were attempting a "population exchange" in Darfur. When asked if this included the large Fur population, Bakhit responded that 1) the Fur occupy a mountainous area that makes it hard to displace them and 2) the mountainous terrain is not appealing to the Arab population.

Comment

¶17. (SBU) While much of the rhetoric was familiar, the gathering of non-signatories with the Special Envoy

clearly was viewed by them as an important step forward. They told us they understood his message of moderating their expectations and also promised to issue a statement renouncing regime change as a political goal.

¶18. (U) This cable was cleared by SE Natsios'

¶19. (U) Tripoli minimize considered. Wall